Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6298th meeting

Wednesday, 14 April 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Ms. Juen
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Marinčić
	Brazil	Mr. Garcia
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	France	Mr. Kassianides
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Lebanon	Ms. Ziade
	Mexico	Mr. Rodiles Bretón
	Nigeria	Mr. Edokpa
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	Uganda	Mr. Kamudoli
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Masilko

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

10-31422 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Shawabkah (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I also wish to commend your predecessor for the prudent manner in which he conducted the work of the Council in March. I would also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

I should like to convey my condolences to the Government and people of China for today's earthquake.

Jordan associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of the Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

There is a great deal of stress and tension in our region because of the lack of real and concrete progress towards achieving the two-State solution and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The severe tension in the Middle East may have alarming consequences if the Israeli Government continues to flout the international consensus in favour of the two-State solution and comprehensive peace based on agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative; to defy the resolutions of international legitimacy; and to pursue its intensified and provocative unilateral practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in East Jerusalem. The perpetuation of the status quo would undermine the sincere efforts being made in that respect, fuel violence and drag the region and its people into chaos and conflict. That, in turn, would have negative repercussions on the security of the world as a whole.

The only way to avert that bleak scenario and to reach a bright future lies in the intensification of international efforts in the coming months to achieve tangible progress towards the implementation of the two-State solution — the only option for resolving the Palestinian question and confirmed again and again in the Security Council's resolutions. Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, is committed to continuing its work with all parties concerned to achieve regional peace and security on the basis of that solution, leading to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State on Palestinian national territory, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with its capital in East Jerusalem and on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967.

In that regard, Jordan highly appreciates the lead role of the United States and stresses the importance of its ongoing efforts and the efforts of the international Quartet, the European Union and all stakeholders to relaunch serious negotiations with clear timelines and benchmarks to measure progress towards the two-State solution in a regional context of comprehensive peace based on agreed principles of international legitimacy, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative.

Jordan has repeatedly expressed its grave concern about and frank condemnation and rejection of all Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, with East Jerusalem at their heart. We have repeatedly warned against their consequences for international peace and security, especially considering the esteemed place held by Jerusalem in the minds and souls of hundreds of millions of Christians and Muslims throughout the world. We warn again today that the continuation of such illegal, illegitimate and condemned procedures in the occupied Palestinian territories in general, and in East Jerusalem in particular, and Israel's feverish attempts to Judaize these territories will drag the entire region into a situation it will be unable to control, posing a major threat to international peace and security, the maintenance of which is a principal function of this Council.

The practices of the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories contradict the spirit of genuine peace and reflect no desire for peace. Israel has pursued its provocative unilateral measures in occupied East Jerusalem, including excavation around and underneath sacred Islamic and Christian sites, in particular the Al-Haram Al-Sharif; the demolition of homes; the obstruction of the work of the Palestinian Endowment administration; the confiscation of lands; the expulsion of Arab residents; and ongoing attempts

to create new realities on the ground, to change the demographic nature of occupied East Jerusalem, to obliterate the Arab, Islamic and Christian features of the city, and to alter the legal status of the city under Israeli occupation.

Such practices are illegal, illegitimate and null and void, and must not continue. They contravene international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, and relevant United Nations resolutions, including many adopted by this Council. They represent a grave violation of Israel's obligations and commitments as the occupying Power.

For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, the desecration of the holy city is a red line that cannot be crossed. Jerusalem will remain a priority of our country and we will spare no effort to preserve it, to protect and maintain the Islamic and Christian holy sites, to safeguard the Arab nature and identity of the city, to end the Israeli occupation, and to support its steadfast people. The international community must promptly hold Israel accountable for its actions and urge it to end violations that undermine the prospects for peace and impose a fait accompli. Jordan calls on the international community to see to it that no irresponsible measures are undertaken to undermine the potential for negotiations between the two parties.

Jordan appreciates the clear positions recently enunciated by the international community, including the Quartet, which has emphasized the importance of Jerusalem and reiterated that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the territories occupied in 1967. It has also condemned the settlement activities there and in the other occupied Palestinian territories, all of which are blatant violations of international humanitarian law and of Israel's obligations under the Road Map.

The Israeli settlements and their ongoing construction are an unbearable burden to the Palestinians, their movement and their development, and represent a genuine obstacle to international and regional efforts to relaunch the negotiations. They undermine the prospects for a peaceful solution and a future independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State. We call upon Israel to immediately and completely halt all such activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, first and foremost in East Jerusalem, including so-called natural growth.

Achieving peace requires a radical change in the tragic status quo experienced by the Palestinians in the occupied territories, especially in the Gaza Strip. We call upon the international community, owing to its humanitarian and legal responsibility, to support our Palestinian brothers and sisters, to provide humanitarian assistance, to end their suffering and its consequences, to take immediate, effective action to ensure that Israel abides by resolution 1860 (2009), and to work to lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. We in Jordan will spare no effort in continuing to provide all forms of support for our Palestinian brothers and sisters and in making others aware of their profound suffering.

Israel must know that it cannot depend on occupation, walls and military power indefinitely. It cannot be governed by a fortress mentality. Genuine, lasting peace for Israel will never come about until that country can become naturally integrated with its surroundings and can coexist peacefully with other countries of the region.

The explicit collective commitment of the Arab and Islamic States, which constitute more than a third of the United Nations membership, to attaining such a peace is reflected in their support for the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit. This is a key starting point for addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Today we repeat our call to seize the historic opportunity presented by the Arab Peace Initiative to put an end to conflict and establish a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-State solution, to put an end to the occupation of all Syrian and Lebanese territory and to ensure peace and security for all the States and peoples of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): As Under-Secretary-General Pascoe noted in his briefing, yesterday in Madrid, Norway chaired the biannual meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), the coordination mechanism for the international donor community. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of the implementation of the Palestinian Government's two-year plan and to discuss the way forward. Launched in August 2009, the plan is a political vision for the establishment of a Palestinian State and the

primary platform for the engagement of the international donor community.

Prime Minister Fayyad reported that his Government is on track with the implementation of the plan. Some sectors are in need of additional attention, while others are developing beyond expectations. But overall the Palestinian Authority is progressing towards the goal of completing the State-building process by the end of 2011. In the Prime Minister's words, we are approaching "the home stretch" of the Palestinian State-building process and seeing the contours of an emerging Palestinian State structure.

The Palestinian economy, however, is suffering. While economic growth for 2009 is estimated at around 7 per cent, there is doubt as to whether that growth can be sustained unless Israel continues easing restrictions and allows the Palestinian economy to flourish. A precondition for a sustainable Palestinian economy and reduced donor dependency is access and movement of goods and people throughout the Palestinian territory. East Jerusalem constitutes 12 per cent of the Palestinian economy and must become an integral part of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority estimates its annual loss of revenue from the blockade of Gaza at $500 million, representing around 42 per cent of the estimated donor funded budget support to the Authority in 2010.

There is, however, a limit as to how far the Palestinian Authority, with the financial support of the donor community, can move the reform agenda without a meaningful peace process and a negotiated settlement. At one point, the fundamental issues that stand in the way of a two-State solution must be negotiated and resolved, paving the way for a Palestinian State. Norway strongly supports the efforts by the United States of America to resume the negotiations and will continue to work with the international donor community to make sure that support for the two-year plan remains intact. However, the unconditional support of donors cannot be taken for granted. Unless the donor community sees a strong determination by the parties to enter into a meaningful peace process with a timeline for the completion of negotiations and the two-State solution, willingness to continue funding the Palestinian State-building project will erode, undermining all that we have achieved over the past 17 years.

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, warnings that we are at a critical juncture have over the years not been in short supply. But I would like to point out one element that has changed the picture. The notion of a Palestinian State has over these years evolved from merely a concept, through a possibility, and now, judging from the reports to the AHLC meeting yesterday, to a reality within reach. The Palestinian Authority has provided us with a timeline for the completion of the State-building process. It is time for the parties to provide us with a timeline for the completion of the final status negotiations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate as part of the intensified programme of the Japanese presidency of the Security Council for this month, especially in the light of the current delicate situation in the Middle East. I wish also to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the region.

It is only natural that we support the statements made by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Group of Arab States, by the representative of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Nonetheless, I wish to make a number of points in my national capacity.

Let me begin by saying that no neutral observer of recent developments in the Middle East could fail to notice the stark contrast between the international community's tireless, constant efforts and initiatives, on the one hand, and the unfortunate facts on the ground, on the other. Every time there are prospects on the horizon for the peace process to move forward, the Israeli party takes opposing measures in order to block and stifle those positive efforts to resume the negotiating process in their infancy. The international community has repeatedly taken note of the very grave decisions taken by Israel over the past two months. In addition, however, only a few days after the decision taken by the ministerial-level Arab Peace Initiative Committee at the beginning of March, and despite all attempts and measures to counter this, Israel announced its immoral and illegal decision to construct 1,600 additional housing units in East Jerusalem.

Following that, the most recent Arab summit, held in early April in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, took several important decisions, including a reaffirmation that negotiation remains a strategic option for the Arab side to regain usurped rights and consequently to achieve the just and comprehensive peace desired by all. But instead of responding positively, the Israeli side chose a policy of escalation and took an extremely grave decision last week, declaring its intention to deport tens of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank, thus labelling them foreigners in their own land and declaring their presence there illegitimate.

However, however grave they are, these decisions are further links in a long chain of procrastination on these issues. This can only lead to further deterioration of the situation and to the further strengthening of extremism and violent fundamentalism, thus hindering dialogue and weakening the prospect of peace that would enable the Palestinians to regain their legitimate rights under the aegis of the international community and within the framework of international legitimacy. It is evident that the recent decisions taken by Israel were only meant to stall negotiations and vitiate the process, particularly because those who wish to see the negotiations succeed and an independent State established on the Palestinians' own land will be deported from that land.

Based on our responsibility under the leadership of His Majesty the King of Morocco as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, we reiterate our serious concern over the grave decisions that the Israeli authorities continue to take in East Jerusalem. In this regard, we are also following with grave concern the escalation of the illegitimate settler policies in the occupied Palestinian territories in general and in East Jerusalem in particular, in an attempt to change the demographic composition of the city, to create a new fait accompli and to reduce the contiguous Arab presence as much as possible. This in turn undermines the possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian State.

In its insistence on these unilateral actions, Israel has continued its rejected campaign against Islamic holy sites, targeting the Al-Aqsa mosque by covering up provocative actions by Israeli extremists to prevent people from safely reaching houses of prayer, and by its ongoing excavations and tunnelling under and around the Al-Aqsa mosque.

In this context, my delegation has previously expressed its total rejection of the recent decision to place Islamic sites in Hebron and Bethlehem on the list of Israeli heritage sites, which is a direct provocation to the feelings of hundreds of millions of Muslims and of all those who advocate peace and coexistence in the holy city. Considering the central position of Jerusalem in the Middle East crisis and its symbolic value to all religions, we appeal to the international community, and especially the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibility and translate their words into action to put an end to these practices, in order to pave the way to meaningful and firm negotiations.

The international community's awareness of the gravity of the recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and the resulting consequences for international peace and security should be accompanied by firmer and more effective positions that guarantee the minimum necessary for a relaunch of genuine negotiations that preserve the vital mutual interest of all peoples of the region to live in an environment of peace, security and cooperation.

In order to attain this objective, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to carry out its best efforts within the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee, with a view to achieving a comprehensive and lasting solution through negotiations on final status issues, particularly with regard to Jerusalem, considering its importance and status. However, such a just and comprehensive solution can come about only with Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories, and with the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

We continue to follow with great interest the intensified efforts of the United States and the Quartet, and we take note of the obstacles on the path of the negotiating process. We also value other international efforts, including those of the European Union, and hope that they will lead to the launch of new, serious and genuine negotiations, based on relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, which all have the blessing of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mashabane (South Africa): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council during the month of April.

I would like to join others in expressing our sincere condolences to the People's Republic of China on the loss of life caused by the earthquake.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

As we have stated many times before, it is our strong view that the Security Council should shoulder its responsibility in this matter in a fair, just and consistent manner. As we meet here today, the insecurity in the Middle East continues to affect the occupied Palestinian territories and the State of Israel, as well as the Middle East region as a whole. This insecurity is the result of the continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory by the State of Israel, the continuation of the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip, the unlawful settlement activities within the occupied territories of Palestine, the failure to address the legitimate right of return of Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, as well as the continuation of retaliatory Qassam rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory into Israel. These activities are compounded by the failure to achieve a negotiated settlement with respect to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The South African Government has noted with concern Israel's recent settlement announcement regarding East Jerusalem and its decision to declare the holy shrines in Hebron and Bethlehem in the West Bank as national heritage sites.

South Africa maintains that these settlement activities and the decision by Israel regarding these holy shrines in two West Bank cities erode trust and threaten the peace process. These actions by Israel constitute yet another attempt to extend its control over the West Bank and create a new reality on the ground. South Africa reiterates that these actions on the part of Israel make a resumption of negotiations in the stalled Middle East peace process difficult and undercut the confidence and trust required to take the process forward. We therefore call on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory immediately and to abstain from further actions in East Jerusalem that could lead to an escalation of violence in the region.

My delegation also notes with concern the activities and policies of the Israeli Government and its military forces aimed at creating a new reality on the ground. These provocative and defiant actions of the occupying Power — as witnessed in its settlement policies, recent orders threatening the deportation of thousands of Palestinians, aerial raids on Palestinian areas and the illegal blockade on Gaza — continue to cause suffering and destruction and adversely impact health and educational services and the socio-economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine.

South Africa is deeply concerned about Israel's prohibition of the importation of construction materials into Gaza, which undermines and negatively impacts reconstruction efforts following the devastating and destructive attacks on Gaza. As an occupying Power, Israel has specific and clear obligations under international law. The international community's demand that Israel end the illegal blockade, which has exacerbated the suffering of ordinary civilians, must complied with. The blockade and the restrictions imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contrary to the will of the international community, as expressed in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003) and in the Arab Peace Initiative.

My delegation welcomes the recent meeting of the Quartet held on 19 March 2010 in Moscow and the ongoing efforts of the Government of the United States of America to launch proximity talks that should lead to negotiations with a view towards resolving all final status issues.

In conclusion, South Africa maintains that the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing side by side the State of Israel within the 4 June, 1967, armistice borders, as well as the complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as encompassed in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), along with a guarantee of the right of return of all Palestinian refugees as set forth in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is the only means of finding a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In this regard, mere words and good will from the international community are no longer good enough. Meaningful action to bring about peace in the Middle East and the realization of Palestine's legitimate expectation of statehood is required. Israel must be held accountable for its actions. Action on the part of the Security Council, which shoulders the noble responsibility of securing international peace and security, would certainly be a step in that direction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): At the outset, I would like to express our condolences to the Chinese delegation for the loss of life and property in the earthquake that struck China today. Our hearts go out to the victims.

The Pakistani delegation would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful handling of the work of the Security Council during your presidency. We also thank you for convening this very important meeting.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his invaluable insights on the current situation in the region.

Pakistan would like to associate itself with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt and Syria on behalf of the Non-Alignment Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively.

The Middle East question and the plight of the Palestinians have remained a major challenge for the international community for many years. After seven decades of futility in addressing this challenge, one has to say that, if nothing else, at least a consensus for peace seems to be emerging in the international community. The statements that we have heard so far this morning confirm our recognition that this must be so. The question now is how to convert our collective desire for peace into a credible action plan for a wider political settlement that would end the cycle of violence and conflict in the region.

Without an end to mutual suspicion and discord, I am not sure that a durable and viable political settlement could actually take place. It would require the international community to unequivocally call upon Israel to check the policies of its occupying forces that have converted the sacred land into a complex of checkpoints, roadblocks, siege and separation walls. These policies have compounded the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people by disrupting and adding misery to their already miserable lives.

This does not augur well for developing a peaceful atmosphere. In addition to an improvement in the humanitarian situation, it is essential that any provocative measures taken by the authorities cease. Such measures include settlement activity, especially in and around East Jerusalem, and a growing trend to alter the status of centuries-old places of prayer — mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people. These provocations neutralize the voices of peace and accord. These provocations also resonate as a loud political statement of utter disregard for the norms of international law and respect for heritage, culture, history and traditions.

More disquieting are the latest reports of the imposition of a military order that empowers the occupying forces to arbitrarily expel the Palestinian people from the West Bank and Gaza. Of late, the world has been riddled with extrajudicial, extra-constitutional and other such activities; this order is the latest among them. Imposed under the garb of so-called additional legal oversight, this order will be a new tool for deporting and imprisoning the Palestinian people. Such a measure will not only vitiate the atmosphere, which needs to be conducive to the cause of peace, but also raise doubts about the commitment of Israel to a negotiated political settlement.

The cessation of repressive and provocative measures is essential to building an environment that is conducive to implementing the strategies of peace within given timelines. In this context, we have taken positive note of the strategy outlined in the statement issued by the Middle East Quartet in Moscow on 19 March 2010. However, the Quartet must now back its words with greater political drive for a sustained dialogue towards the final settlement, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

We believe that the Quartet's commitments do not obviate the role of the Security Council, but reinforce it. We hope that the Council, in accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, will continue to strive for the implementation of its relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Pakistan's full support for a lasting peace for all the inhabitants of the

region and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in complete peace with all its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his presentation to us today. We would like to join others in offering our condolences to the people and Government of the People's Republic of China on the earthquake that just occurred there. The Cuban people express their solidarity with the people of China.

Cuba associates itself with the statement by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Security Council periodically reviews the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. However, little progress has been achieved. The situation in the region, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, is marked by instability and insecurity.

Israel's ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the major obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. In flagrant violation of international law and counter to the objectives of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its illegal construction of the wall along the West Ban and, in particular, in and around East Jerusalem, among other things.

The settlement activities, even after the partial and temporary moratorium proclaimed in November 2009, have continued uninterrupted. At present, over 3,700 housing units are under construction and more than 200 Palestinian homes have been demolished to carry out these illegal activities.

Cuba expresses great concern at the ongoing demolition by Israel of Palestinian homes and the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other illegal acts of incitement, provocation and aggression by extremist settlers against the Palestinian population and sacred places. This makes the current situation very volatile and dangerous.

The great physical, economic and social devastation caused by these illegal and destructive colonization practices have a profound effect on the peace process and may prejudice the outcome of an agreement on the final status of Jerusalem.

Such measures and policies carried out by Israel constitute serious and flagrant violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The international community, including the Security Council, must urgently act in response to these dangerous illegal measures adopted by Israel, which are aimed at hindering and putting an end to the peace initiatives, even before they begin, with the objective of continuing to consolidate its unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and carrying out a de facto annexation of more Palestinian land.

Israel cannot be allowed to continue to perpetrate serious and flagrant breaches of international law with impunity. The international community must demand that Israel comply with its obligations, including those arising from the Fourth Geneva Convention, and put an end to all its illegal policies and practices in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The situation in the Gaza Strip, after the brutal attack perpetrated by Israel a year ago, is unsustainable. The imposition by Israel of closings and restrictions on the free circulation and access of people and goods, including humanitarian and medical supplies, has made the recovery and reconstruction of the area virtually impossible and has further affected the already precarious living conditions of the population.

The international community cannot remain indifferent. It must take all possible practical measures to ensure that Israel puts an end to these inhuman and illegal policies, which heighten the tensions in the Palestinian population. Once again, Cuba calls for Israel to lift the cruel and illegal blockade and allow the free entry of supplies into the Gaza Strip.

Cuba reaffirms that all measures or actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at changing the legal, physical and demographic composition of the occupied Syrian Golan and its

institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to exercise jurisdiction and administrative power there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all those measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as a challenge to the international community. Cuba demands that Israel withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Cuba once again reiterates its position in support of a just and lasting peace for all peoples of the Middle East that would put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories by Israel since 1967 and guarantee the Palestinian people's exercise of their self-determination by establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Mr. President, let me first congratulate you on your presidency of this Council and, secondly, align myself and my delegation with the statements by the representatives of Egypt and Syria, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. Thirdly, I would like to extend our condolences to the People's Republic of China for the loss of life and damage caused by the most recent earthquake.

By constructing thousands of new illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel is killing off whatever hopes there are for peace in the Middle East. In so doing, Israel has put itself firmly on the wrong side of history, whereas everyone else around the world has moved or is moving towards peace. These actions have also subjected it to unprecedented and unanimous condemnation by the entire international community, at a level of ferocity hitherto unprecedented.

Israel has found itself completely isolated. But most disturbingly, Israel's intransigence in building these settlements is another example fitting a general pattern of behaviour proving its general unwillingness to undertake any measures that may lead to peace, which first and foremost requires compromise. Other examples include the building of the separation wall, which snakes into Palestinian territory; the eviction of Palestinian families and the demolition of Palestinian homes; the revocation of residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem, forbidding them to live in the city of their birth; the new Israeli military order which will give the Israeli occupying forces the power to deport Palestinians in the West Bank who are deemed to be infiltrating the occupied territory; and, incessant attacks on Palestinians by illegal Israeli settlers, and the lack of law enforcement by Israeli authorities to stop or even prevent such attacks.

It is apparent that such behaviour defies numerous Security Council resolutions, which call upon Israel to cease and desist and to comply with and abide by international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Above all, it pre-empts the viable two-State solution by changing the facts on the ground. Hence, the international community, including the Security Council, must hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions and put an end to this occupation.

The blockade imposed by Israel in war-wrecked Gaza is a form of collective punishment forbidden by international law. It has forced 1.5 million Gazans to live in deplorable conditions. We urge Israel to lift this inhumane blockade in order to allow the movement of essential goods, including construction materials. In addition, it is imperative for the parties concerned and the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Security Council, to undertake actions in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 64/10 and 64/254 in order to ensure accountability by bringing the perpetrators identified in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48) to justice.

Resolving these issues requires the international community to focus all its energy and efforts on restoring comprehensive peace in the region and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State of Palestine. This requires, inter alia, the political will of this Council to bring into effect the Council's very own resolutions.

The President: I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me at the beginning to join previous speakers to convey our condolences and sympathy to the

delegation of China for the tragic earthquake that occurred today in its country.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency and for having convened this open debate at this critical juncture. The issue under discussion is of paramount importance, and this meeting is all the more important because it is being held at a time when the fate of the Palestinian people is at stake due to different ineffectual peace proposals and the continuation of the most heinous brutalities against that people, particularly in Gaza and East Jerusalem. Although more than a year has passed since the end of the brutal attack on Gaza, reconstruction of the destroyed and damaged areas, buildings and infrastructure remains nearly impossible due to the Israeli regime's continuing blockade. Relief agencies in Gaza continue to work in a very harsh environment to help those in desperate need, in particular the children, women and other vulnerable people in the region.

The problem of the Middle East is not a lack of peace plans, but rather the lack of a correct understanding and reading of the root cause of the crisis. As we have mentioned repeatedly, the fundamental problem of this long-standing crisis is the illegitimate occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and the Israeli regime's intransigence with respect to every single principle of international law. Furthermore, persistent attempts to introduce external elements as the main factors hindering the so-called peace process and the preservation of stability in the region, with a view to diverting attention from the root cause of the crisis and to evading its crimes and responsibilities, have been an integral part of the Israeli regime's policies since its unblessed birth.

Israeli officials, in line with this policy, instead of answering to world public opinion of their unparalleled record of non-compliance with all humanitarian and human rights principles and their long and dark catalogue of crimes and atrocities — including occupation, aggression, militarism, State terrorism, and crimes against humanity — have always embarked on making inflammatory remarks and baseless allegations against other countries. It is now widely recognized that the Israeli regime's clandestine development and unlawful possession of between 100 to 300 nuclear warheads, and its constant threats to use them against certain countries, pose a uniquely grave threat to regional and international peace and security.

The blatant support of certain Powers for the Israeli regime is one of the bitterest realities of our world today. By blocking any action against the inhumane policies and acts of this regime in each and every corner of the world, its supporters have given it a blank check to freehandedly violate, in an atmosphere of impunity, all internationally recognized rights of the Palestinian people and other peoples of the region.

Turning to the issue of Palestine, it is regrettable to witness that the inaction of relevant United Nations organs in dealing with the Israeli regime's illegal policies and practices has emboldened that dangerous regime to continue its crimes against the defenceless Palestinian people. The systematic acquisition of Palestinian lands through unlawful policies and practices, the killing and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, and causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Palestine are part and parcel of the normal activities of this brutal regime.

Persistent assaults against the Islamic and Christian holy places in Jerusalem; the continued construction of the separation wall and excavation work in and around the Holy Mosque; the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in the city; the forced eviction of Palestinian families from the city; and the imposition of severe restrictions on movement are but some of the illegal acts carried out by the Israeli regime in the West Bank.

Despite strong international condemnation, illegal settlements are being expanded much faster than they were in the past, and more and more Palestinian houses are being demolished. The illegal decision of the said regime to build new housing units is a move that is undoubtedly geared at altering the demographic composition and architectural, cultural and religious character of the Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

There is an urgent need to put an end to these acts. There should be no room for criminals who are motivated to commit atrocities. This Council should live up to its responsibilities in supporting the Palestinians and relieving them of their long suffering under occupation.

With regard to the follow-up to the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), we particularly hope that, within the coming months as United Nations bodies review the report again, those members of the Security Council who rock-solidly and unwaveringly support

the Israeli regime in total disregard of the norms and principles of international human rights and international humanitarian law will adjust their positions to the growing international demand for justice and the prosecution of the Gaza war criminals.

The Israeli regime has persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon by constantly violating Lebanon's land, sea and air space and by refusing to withdraw from occupied Lebanese land in the Sheba'a, the Kfar Shouba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village. It is also continuing its occupation of the Syrian Golan. That regime should immediately and fully withdraw from those occupied territories in compliance with the basic principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Before concluding, I would like to react to the reference made about my country by the representative of the Israeli regime this morning. I would like to put it on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions she expressed. This is yet another tired practice by that regime to distract the attention of the international community from its nuclear arsenal, as well as its criminal policies and abhorrent atrocities in the region, including its recent heinous crimes against the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

Attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the realization of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond. In our view, a lasting peace in Palestine and the region is possible through justice, an end to discrimination and an end to the occupation of Palestine and other occupied territories. Today, we need to act collectively to demonstrate our wholehearted support for the cause of Palestine and rally to assist those who have been deprived of their rights. Let us hope that the oppression and occupation will end and justice and freedom will prevail in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Rosales Díaz (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like first to convey the condolences of the Government of Nicaragua to our sister nation of China for the earthquake that occurred this morning. I would also like to congratulate you on your presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle Ea including the question of Palestine.

Nicaragua, as a member of the Non-Align Movement, fully associates itself with the statem made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt Chair of our Movement. I would also like to thank t Under-Secretary-General for Political Affai Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for the briefing he gave the Coun this morning.

Once again, Nicaragua reiterates its profou condemnation of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and demand its immediate withdrawal. We condemn t Israeli policies and practices of construction a non-dismantling of settlements, as well as the inhum blockade of Gaza and the policy of breaking up t West Bank and other Palestinian territories. Havi converted the Gaza Strip into a cemetery, t occupying army has launched a policy aimed completely crushing the Palestinian people with t construction of 1,600 new settlements in E Jerusalem, breaching international law, particularly t Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel has also illegal and provocatively designated two sacred places in t occupied Palestinian territory as belonging to Isra national heritage.

As if this were not enough, the occupying for has decided to proceed with mass expulsions promulgating a military order, which, if implemente would mean that tens of thousands of Palestinia would be arrested and illegally expelled from th homes in the West Bank. This order is not mere illegal and in violation of human rights; its wording so general that, in theory, it would enable the Isra army to deport all the Palestinian inhabitants of t West Bank by classifying them as infiltrators, th achieving the aim of cleansing the entire West Bank its Arab population.

Nicaragua rejects and roundly condemns t illegal expansion of settlements and the expulsion Palestinian inhabitants, and categorically denounc Israeli plans and actions aimed at the demograph re-engineering of East Jerusalem by cleansing it of Arab characteristics. This is further proof that for Isr the two-State solution, living side by side, is not option. Israel, ignoring the international outrage, contravention of the most basic rules of internatio law, is violating the Charter of the United Nations a

every human rights law and ignoring the relevant United Nations resolutions — as well as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which declared the wall to be illegal — thus perpetuating the hardline and brutal occupation of Palestine.

For some inexplicable reason, many developed countries, supposedly in favour of human rights, maintain political, economic and military support for Israel, thus rewarding it for its conduct, such as, for example, the updating of the agreement with the European Union and the invitation to Israel to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is unacceptable to see the total impunity with which Israeli actions and policies have been carried out over the last 60 years, and demonstrating the surprising incapacity of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Jayasekara (Sri Lanka): At the outset let me express our condolences to the Government and people of China on the loss of lives and property due to the devastating earthquake today.

Permit me to congratulate your delegation, Mr. President, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing.

My delegation believes that a resolution of the Palestinian issue is crucial for restoring peace in the entire Middle East, with implications elsewhere. Sri Lanka has consistently supported peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue and called on all sides to fully implement the resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the realization of the two-State solution. Our hope is that the day will soon come when Israel, Palestine and their other regional neighbours can coexist in peace and harmony.

We remain deeply concerned at the daily widespread suffering and hardships that the Palestinian people continue to endure as a result of the economic blockade and the ensuing grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. While we note the relaxation of some restrictions by the Israeli Government, we call for the removal of all restrictions. Further relaxations could enhance the confidence level of all concerned. The Palestinian people have suffered for too long and continue to live under occupation, denial of their fundamental right to statehood, w has been recognized by the United Nations, du continued Israeli occupation has seriously affe progress in the socio-economic indicators for population in Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

In that context, my delegation believes tha peace is to be viable and sustainable in the Palest territory, Israel must withdraw from all occu Palestinian territories back to the 1967 borders. It end the economic blockade, the illegal expansio settlements and the construction of the separation Changing the demographic character of the Palest territory will only increase tension and animosity i entire Middle East region.

The Palestinian Authority needs to continue implementation of its security plan and make e effort it can to improve law and order and ensure its territory is not used for illegal attacks on Is civilians. Allegations of illegal arms flows mus investigated. Both sides must do everything possib ensure the safety and security of civilians.

Sri Lanka reiterates its support for the Palest National Authority under the leadership of Pres Mahmoud Abbas. We stress the need to preserve protect national and democratic institutions, whic vital to a future independent Palestinian State. therefore urge Palestinian groups to act speedil reconcile and reunite within the framework of Palestinian National Authority. Unity among Palestinian people is their strength.

My delegation supports international ef towards the early resumption of negotiations believes that the unity of the Palestinian peop essential to ensuring proper conditions for resumption of dialogue between Israel and Palesti an early stage. We also urge both sides to ensu climate conducive to the resumption of negotiat We regret that the announcement of new settle construction has resulted in a setback to the pro that has been made.

We also remain concerned about the situatio the occupied Syrian Golan, including the pligh Syrian detainees. We call for the implementation o the relevant Security Council resolutions, in parti resolution 497 (1981).

Sri Lanka reiterates its support for lasting peace in the Middle East, including the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Zahir Tanin, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Tanin: Before I begin, I would like to take a brief moment to pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the earthquake that took place today in western China. As reports continue to come in, it is clear that this tragic event and its consequences will have serious effects on tens of thousands of lives, in addition to the hundreds killed and thousands injured. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People stands in solidarity with the people of China as they work to rebuild. I would like to offer the Chinese delegation our deepest sympathies and our full support today and in the days and months to come.

In my capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the exemplary manner in which you have been steering the work of the Council during this month. I would also like to express my appreciation to Ambassador Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet of Gabon for the efficient manner in which he presided over Council during the month of March.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretariat for its monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Such briefings serve a useful practical purpose, as they reflect the latest developments on the ground and the efforts of various stakeholders in the international community to move the peace process forward.

Sadly, as we meet here today there appears to be little hope for a serious turnaround in the all-too-familiar pattern of events on the ground. Violence continues to affect the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. The Committee has condemned the use by Israel of its military might against the occupied Palestinian people, be it through the bombing of areas in Gaza, incursions into Palestinian cities in the West Bank and Gaza, or dispersing non-violent protestors in front of the separation wall built illegally on Palestinian land. The Committee has also been unequivocal in condemning the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian groups from Gaza into Israel. Violence from both sides has to stop.

The Committee also considers it alarming and totally unacceptable that the Government of Israel continues to flagrantly dismiss numerous calls by members of the international community, including the Quartet, to halt its illegal settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, and especially in East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu's latest statements in that regard send a clear message to the international community that the Israeli strategy is to continue to build in Jerusalem in violation of international law. At the same time, the occupying Power has continued to displace Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem through illegal house demolitions, evictions and revocations of residency rights.

The Committee is also seriously concerned about the new Israeli military order that went into effect yesterday, threatening thousands of residents in the West Bank with deportation. The order is part of the Israeli policy of consolidating and perpetuating its occupation of Palestinian land through forced displacement of the population. Implementing the order would constitute a breach of the Forth Geneva Convention, in particular article 49, which prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers and deportations of protected persons from occupied territory.

It is absolutely clear that, by creating such facts on the ground, the occupying Power is undermining efforts to restart the political process and predetermining the outcome of sensitive permanent-status negotiations on the status of Jerusalem. That approach renders any such negotiations devoid of purpose. In the same vein, Israel's actions and policy on the issue of settlements are a serious threat to the concept of achieving a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State solution. It is obvious that those illegal and provocative actions of the Israeli leadership are also directly undermining current efforts to relaunch the political process between the parties.

The Committee fully supports the demand of the Middle East Quartet that Israel freeze all settlement activity, dismantle outposts and refrain from illegal house demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem. I would like to emphasize here that those are not preconditions for resuming the negotiating process; they are Israeli obligations under the Road Map, as

endorsed by the Council. It is hoped that the 10-month freeze in settlement expansion declared by the Israeli Government will be comprehensive, extended to East Jerusalem and retained indefinitely.

I would like to inform the members of the Council that, at the end of March, the Committee convened its annual United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people. Its goal was to draw the attention of the international community to the programme of the Palestinian Authority entitled "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State", which has become known as the Fayyad plan. The programme might be understood as the Palestinian answer to Israeli settlement-building, as it aims to unilaterally create positive facts on the ground. Unlike Israel's settlement activity, the Palestinian Authority's programme is consistent with international law, welcomed and supported by the international community and promotes rather than impedes prospects for a peace agreement. The plan reflects the Palestinians' determination to empower themselves by taking their destiny into their own hands and shouldering their share of responsibility by building State institutions under the Israeli occupation with a view to ending it.

This forward-looking programme of the Palestinian Authority deserves the full attention and tangible support of the international community. The Palestinian Authority has proven its ability to transform international support into concrete Government-administered programmes, as demonstrated by the reform of the law and order sector and improved transparency at all levels and in all sectors of its activity. The Fayyad plan is a logical continuation of these efforts.

It has to be borne in mind that this programme is not being implemented in a political vacuum. It is now and will be in the foreseeable future critically affected by developments in the political process. In fact, its success is determined by the measure of progress in the political area. On the international level, support needs to be built for the broad recognition of an independent Palestinian State. At the end of the projected two years of the plan, this recognition could be enshrined in a Security Council resolution clearly determining the borders of the Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 lines.

Our Committee has come out strongly in supp of the Palestinian Authority's State-build programme. We would like to encourage the memb of the Security Council to support the realization this plan, which has already been endorsed by Secretary-General, the Quartet and the League of A States. By putting the weight of its authority beh this plan, the Council will create the necessary politi framework for ending the occupation implementing the two-State solution, with Israel Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I sha like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of presidency of the Security Council for this month wish you every success in your deliberations.

I also extend my sincere condolences to Chinese delegation for the earthquake in China, wh has caused grave loss of life and property.

Since the most recent open debate of the Secu Council on the situation in the Middle East, includ the Palestinian question, held in January, stakeholders in the peace process have made inten efforts and the international community has striven establish conditions conducive to a resumption negotiations in order to end the stalemate in the reg At that time, we looked forward to a détente improvement in the situation that would reactivate negotiations. However, in recent months, a numbe incidents and escalations have further exacerba tensions and the situation in the region.

Israel's intransigent position, intensification settlement activities and recent acts of aggres towards the Palestinian people have undermined eff to relaunch negotiations, despite broad internati support and the efforts of the influential par concerned, especially the United States of America resume indirect talks between the two parties would pave the way towards substantive consultati to address the root causes of the conflict. Th endeavours have been supported by the Arab States statement issued by the follow-up committee on Arab Peace Initiative, embodying a construc position that reflects the eagerness of Arab countrie support any effort to implement the will of peace.

Unfortunately, the ongoing appeals of various States and regional and international organizations have not been met with a positive response from the Israeli occupation forces, which have continued to act provocatively and to disavow agreements and terms of reference previously agreed with a view to attaining a peaceful settlement of the situation. In that respect, I should like to reiterate my country's full condemnation of Israel's policy of maintaining the status quo. I recall in that respect the statement of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the recent Arab summit in Sirte, Libya, in which he said that

> "Israel's ongoing acts of provocation, maintenance of the status quo, and deliberate intent to thwart any serious attempt to resume negotiations can only deepen the despair and frustration of the Arabs and of peace-loving nations throughout the world, and will aggravate the regional tensions and stalemate".

I also recall His Excellency's position on the same occasion concerning Tunisia's categorical rejection of Israel's schemes to alter the identity of Jerusalem and to forcefully displace its population, in particular in East Jerusalem, which it occupied in 1967 and seeks today to annex, in flagrant defiance of the will of the international community.

In a statement issued by its Ministry for Foreign Affairs on 11 March, Tunisia denounced the decision of the Israeli Government to build 1,600 settlement units in Jerusalem and the West Bank. This plan was denounced by all parties concerned, including the Secretary-General in his statement of 9 March, the Quartet and a number of regional and international organizations. Despite the clear, firm and unwavering positions adopted in this respect, Israel's illegitimate practices have continued unabated, calling for immediate and decisive intervention on the part of the international community to compel it to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy and its commitments under agreements and resolutions previously concluded.

The maintenance of the deteriorating status quo in the Gaza Strip, which is causing a large-scale humanitarian, economic and social crisis; settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank; the desecration of holy places; the use of force against Palestinian civilians and deprival of their basic rights; the forced displacement of numerous Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem; and Israel's intransigence and the impossible conditions it has set, hindering the resumption of the peace process, will clearly freeze and kill any prospects for the peace we all seek. This is all taking place in a region ill-equipped to endure this tense and deteriorating situation, which is a real cause of alarm and the source of tangible problems and tension on the ground.

Tunisia reiterates once again its call on the international partners, foremost among which is the Quartet, to step up their efforts to force Israel to end its acts of provocation and to engage seriously in the peace efforts. On the basis of its adherence to the principles of peace, justice, détente and the will to implement peace, Tunisia calls on the international community to mitigate the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people by improving their humanitarian, economic and social circumstances. My country reaffirms that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be achieved only through dialogue and negotiation, which require the parties to abstain from all acts of provocation and violence and from any activity likely to prejudge the outcome of negotiations on the main substantive issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the question of Jerusalem and the borders of the future Palestinian State.

The Palestinian question has always been a top priority for Tunisia, which has consistently stood with the brotherly Palestinian people in its just endeavour to recover its national rights and to establish its independent State on its national soil. In that respect, Tunisia reaffirms its support for all serious efforts to find a just and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict that would restore the occupied Arab territories on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

With respect to the two sisterly countries of Lebanon and Syria, I reiterate my country's demand that Israel fully withdraw from Syrian and Lebanese territory, in line with the option of attaining a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the Middle East crisis, and in a way that will provide peace and security for all peoples of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Thank you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to add my voice to the

debate on this vexed subject. Also, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency for the month of April. My appreciation goes also to the delegation of Gabon for having presided over the work of the Security Council during the month of March.

Like previous speakers, let me also take this opportunity to extend my condolences to the Chinese delegation following the sad disaster of a devastating earthquake.

In Louis Fischer's book entitled *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*, Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi ventured into the question of Israel and Palestine with a mixed sense of foreboding. He went on to express his sympathy for the ages-long persecution of the Jewish community, with whom he had developed a rapport and affinity while in exile in South Africa. However, he also observed that the call for a national home for the Jews in the Middle East and the fact that the Arabs sought to call Palestine their home were equally compelling.

What is evident therefore is that neither party was more qualified to impose their will on the other. Gandhi would later say, in 1938, "What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct". But for generations now, that Middle East region has known no peace, and success in the international community's efforts to resolve the conflict has been elusive.

More than 60 years down the line, we are still struggling with finding a durable solution to the situation in the Middle East, including progress on the question of Palestine. It is inconceivable that people who were born in the same place, as we could be led to understand, and who also have so much in common cannot agree to live peacefully side by side.

As Botswana has stated before on this subject in various forums, there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe that Israel and Palestine must coexist as two sovereign States that share not only a border, but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity.

We therefore urge the people of the Middle East to summon the necessary will and courage to recognize the folly of war and accept the virtue of dialogue. They should start building a common future for generations that will know no violence or conflict, but will instead recognize the virtues of tolerance, accommodation and concord.

In the interest of peace and the protection of innocent civilian lives, it is necessary that all the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions be given full effect and respect, alongside the strict observance of basic humanitarian principles, international law and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict.

Over the years, international diplomatic efforts have intensified with a view to creating an atmosphere conducive to negotiations which are aimed at mutual recognition and achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore wish to echo the call of the international community for both parties to fulfil their obligations under various international instruments and to refrain from any steps that could undermine the momentum of the negotiations process.

The continuing campaign of violence as well as the unending annexation of new territories in the area are the most undesirable of the ingredients that should be avoided in this delicate procedure of remoulding a peaceful accord. Those who employ such unsavoury tactics risk compromising their own credibility and integrity as genuine and committed partners in the quest for solutions to the Situation in the Middle East and settlement of the question of Palestine.

The responsibility for bringing about transformative change in the Middle East would be the greatest reward, and it is a moral imperative, in contrast with carrying out provocative actions, demolitions and invasions and outdoing one another in the theatre of war. Such change should be brought about so that, for the first time in living memory, the children of that region can also realize their dreams rather than face constant confrontation and difficulty, so that they too, like all children in other parts of the world, can live the dignified lives experienced by their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. De Las Ovalles Colmenares (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to join in the expressions of distress and condolences on

the earthquake suffered by the fraternal People's Republic of China.

We wish also to thank you, Sir, for the manner in which you have presided over the work of the Security Council and to congratulate you on having convened this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under your presidency.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is convinced of the need for a final, lasting, negotiated solution that will put an end to violence in the region without undermining the rights of peoples including their free and legitimate right to protect their sovereignty. This conflict poses a threat to international peace, and we therefore support initiatives that promote possible talks. To that end it is important to build mutual trust, within the framework of the Road Map, which has a most relevant role to play.

But the Government of Israel must put an end to its settlement policies and accept East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.

My Government firmly supports the Palestinian Authority State-building programme. Here, we are against the closures in Gaza and of other border crossings, because they are a violation of international humanitarian law. It is striking that, although on the one hand the Government of Israel has advocated a two-State solution, on the other it announces the construction of homes on Palestinian territory for the Israeli occupiers. In clear violation of international humanitarian law, Israel has engaged in the persecution, detention and deportation of any Palestinian residing in the West Bank. Also, no less than 70,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are now at risk of being separated from their families, their land, their livelihood and their social milieu.

On 24 March, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, addressing the Security Council (see S/PV.6292), stressed that almost all recent disturbances between Israelis and Palestinians have taken place in areas where Israeli forces are present in Palestinian-populated areas. I should make it clear too that the Prime Minister of Israel has ignored the requests of the United Nations and the international community to freeze settlement activity. The closure of Gaza continues to be an unacceptable and inhumane situation that must be rectified immediately. We also support President Mahmoud Abbas's demand that Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem be reopened. The impediments placed in the way of Palestinians in using their land to build homes and engage in agriculture constitute an attack on economic development, which results in a deteriorating situation that poses an ongoing threat to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The repeated violations, acts of aggression and other Israeli activities against Lebanon also constitute an obvious destabilization policy by Israel in the region. The permanent violation of air space, territory and the territorial waters of Lebanon, as described by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon on 3 March, confirm that these new and continued threats are clearly non-compliant with resolution 1701 (2006). Similarly, we support the Government of Syria in its demand for compliance with resolution 497 (1981) on the Syrian Golan Heights.

International law prevents Israel from invoking conquest and colonization, and to a lesser extent, natural growth to the detriment of neighbouring peoples. The expulsion of the Palestinian people from their own lands is completely inexcusable and constitutes a violation, unparalleled by any episode of modern history, of the most basic principle of humanitarian law. Our Government has, in this context, insisted on the need to consider Chapter II, in particular Articles 5 and 6, of the United Nations Charter.

The Israeli Government has for some time now acted outside the principles of the United Nations and international law and cannot expect to develop its new concept of so-called natural growth with impunity.

Finally, the Palestinian people should, in all fairness, be recognized for their courage in the face of adversity and the double standards of the international community.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.